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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000162

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER

REF: A. SKOPJE 123

[1B.](#) SKOPJE 120

Classified By: POLOFF NEISULER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (C) During a meeting with Prime Minister Gruevski on February 21, the Ambassador raised U.S. concerns regarding political dialogue, education issues, and the rule of law in Macedonia (reflets). Pledging U.S. support for Macedonia's NATO membership aspirations, the Ambassador stressed that there is still much work to be done, especially in enhancing constructive political dialogue. The Prime Minister acknowledged the gravity of Macedonia's current political challenges and admitted that, if left unresolved, they could lead to the country's "losing NATO." End of Summary.

Political Dialogue and Framework Agreement Implementation

[¶2.](#) (C) During a February 21 meeting with PM Gruevski, the Ambassador noted the positive signal sent by his party's participation in ongoing National Democratic Institute-sponsored discussions among working-level party experts on changes to the parliamentary rule book. Expressing her regret at the boycott of those discussions by the main Albanian opposition party DUI, the Ambassador assessed as positive DUI's desire to at least remain informed about the proceedings. Gruevski assured the Ambassador that his party has "no problem" with political dialogue, but insisted DUI's sole objective was to accomplish its agenda, rather than working constructively with the government (GOM). He commented, in a tone showing he was scandalized at the temerity of DUI, that DUI wants "not dialogue but concessions."

[¶3.](#) (C) The Ambassador suggested that the GOM welcome DUI's desire for concessions by asking for reciprocal concessions as part of the democratic process. She stressed that mutual give and take --concessions in fact-- are the essence of political life and of the relations NATO and the EU expect in Macedonia. Both agreed that pre-conditions for talks were unacceptable, while a detailed agenda on priorities might be helpful in focusing eventual discussions. In that light, Gruevski mentioned a recent message he had sent through EU Special Representative Fouere to DUI president Ahmeti. He proposed to compile a list of laws that would need a Badinter (qualified) parliamentary majority to pass. If DUI accepted the proposal, Gruevski believed that would guarantee more

efficient work in the Parliament in the future and would negate DUI's request to re-compose the parliamentary Inter Ethnic Committee.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador also discussed with Gruevski implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (FWA) in relation to a recent government reshuffle. While the Ambassador was concerned about the inexperience of the newly-appointed Minister for FWA Implementation, Gruevski was confident that the new Minister would build upon the efforts of his predecessor and move the implementation process forward. As evidence of increased GOM attention to FWA implementation, the Prime Minister cited his plan to hire 250 minority public servants, distributed among the various ministries, and an additional 150 to work specifically on EU-related issues. The Ambassador cautioned the GOM against thinking in terms of minority hiring without reference to qualifications or need for the jobs, essentially in order to show improved minority employment statistics. Equitable representation means instead putting ethnic minority members in real jobs.

Education Issues: Nostrification and Religious Instruction

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador pointed to the current burdensome system of nostrification of foreign university degrees as a barrier to trade and knowledge sharing, which encourages brain drain. PM Gruevski agreed wholeheartedly that the laborious nostrification procedure should be transformed into a simple recognition process for foreign degrees. Although he expected strong resistance on the part of professors at Macedonia's state universities, Gruevski said he planned to

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address the issue by the beginning of summer. The Ambassador pledged U.S. support for that process, and stressed that the USG has spent over USD 8 million to educate Macedonians whose American diplomas are not recognized by the current system.

¶6. (SBU) The Ambassador and PM Gruevski discussed the proposal for a Law on Religious Instruction in Schools in the context of Macedonia's NATO priorities. The PM said the draft law allows parents to choose whether their children will study world religions or the religious doctrine of their own faith, taught by priests and other religious leaders. The Ambassador highlighted the law's divisiveness, the value of instruction by teachers according to a curriculum, and urged the GOM to take more time to look at other options for including general religious studies in the school curriculum. She especially highlighted that this law is not a priority for NATO and the EU, and that its controversial nature could further delay consideration of true priority legislation. Gruevski said that he might delay action on the religious instruction law until later in the year.

Rule of Law: TIP, ICTY, Religious Freedom

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador noted positive developments over the past few months in the GOM's fight against trafficking-in-persons (ref A). The Prime Minister confirmed that combating TIP is one of his government's priorities. He stressed that his Cabinet has tasked the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) with the implementation of various anti-TIP measures, including a significant revision of the Criminal Code that should be complete by the end of May. On the MOI side, Gruevski mentioned that specific anti-TIP operations were in the preparation phase, suggesting imminent anti-TIP operations could be expected in the near future.

¶ 8. (C) Following the Ambassador's account of the USG's latest efforts to persuade the Hague Tribunal to delay the return to Macedonian jurisdiction of four unindicted ICTY cases (ref B), the PM repeated his frequent remark that his biggest challenge would be how to explain such a delay to the eMacedonian public. He predicted that, if the four cases (all of them involving allegations against eAlbanians) were delayed, there could be violent rallies during the trials of eMacedonian defendants already in The Hague and awaiting a trial date. The Ambassador pointed out that the premature return of the cases could cause even more problems, since the Macedonian judicial system is not ready to handle them and if they are in Macedonian jurisdiction there will be even greater political pressures to act on the cases quickly, whether this is feasible or not. She assured Gruevski of international community (IC) support for the GOM, both in terms of training, and in weathering the public's reaction to a delay based on the fact that the judiciary, prosecution and investigation services are not at all ready for ICTY cases. She added that any uncertainty about the state of the legal system was resolved by the extraordinary acquittal of Agim Krasniqi days earlier.

¶ 9. (SBU) The Ambassador expressed her appreciation for PM Gruevski's and FM Milososki's efforts in revising the draft Law on Religious Communities and Groups. She said that post was currently reviewing the draft law and would share its comments with OSCE.

Brussels Readout

¶ 10. (C) On his initiative, PM Gruevski gave the Ambassador a briefing on his recent visit to Brussels. His bleak assessment ("we don't have NATO") contrasted starkly with boastful comments in the media after the trip. Gruevski did not hide his frustration with the IC's perceived "lack of understanding of and interest in" his country and all the positive things that he said had been accomplished by the government. Fishing for a reaction, he speculated that "the EU and NATO are simply trying to find a reason not/not to give Macedonia a date for negotiations." The Ambassador told him there simply was no truth to that rumor, and urged Gruevski to focus on accomplishing NATO priorities. She added that the reality is Macedonia seeks admission to NATO, hence it must prove itself. It is not NATO or member states that have to prove their detailed knowledge of developments in

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Macedonia. What matters is results.

COMMENT

¶ 11. (C) Still soaring in public opinion polls at home, Gruevski clearly is frustrated by the tough messages he has heard from the EU and NATO in recent weeks regarding a lack of political dialogue and the slow pace of reforms; his natural tendency is to cast about for scapegoats, even if those turn out to be the bearers of the critical messages. Unlike past discussions with us, however, when he seemed to shrug off criticism and trumpet his oft-repeated achievements, he appeared more thoughtful and open to constructive engagement this time. We are seeing some positive signs of progress, especially on the anti-TIP front, and will continue to apply "soft pressure" at all levels of the GOM to get the political dialogue process and FWA implementation rolling again. In the meantime, it is essential that our message to the GOM continues to be that NATO membership is achievable and that we want Macedonia to succeed. But time is short and there is much to do before Macedonia is ready to assume the responsibilities of membership. Implementation of the FWA, reforms especially in

the judicial arena, and achievement of meaningful political dialogue remain essential.

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